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LITTLE-KNOWN ETHNIC LAO REFUGEES RESETTLE IN LARGER NUMBERS

U.S. refugee officials are approving increasing numbers of Laotian refugees for admission to the United States following the relaxation of the Thai government's "humane deterrence" policy and its institution of a screening process for Laotian arrivals. Of those arriving in the United States for resettlement, a growing portion are ethnic Lao from the lowland region.

Of some 19,000 Southeast Asian refugees approved for U.S. admission in the first five months of FY 86, 10,000 were Laotian nationals. In the first five months of FY 85, only 445 of more than 16,000 Southeast Asian refugees approved for resettlement were nationals of Laos.

Actual admissions to the United States are now beginning to reflect this dramatic increase in Laotian approvals. In January, 139 Laotians arrived in the United States, in February, 106; these figures increased to 883 in March and 1,698 in April, according to State Department statistics. Laotian admissions are expected to continue to increase during the second half of FY 86. However, because cases being approved currently are being drawn from those already determined to be of special interest to the United States, this high approval rate may not continue once the U.S. finishes processing this group.

In contrast to 1985, when Lao nationals represented some 10 percent of the Southeast Asian refugees who resettled in the United States, the Lao national percentage of the total is expected to be about 60 percent for the second six months of FY 86.

The anticipated Laotian percentage of U.S. admissions reflects the current composition by nationality in Thai refugee camps, as well as the January 1986 decision by the Thai government to relax "humane deterrence" by allowing resettlement processing for Laotian refugees from the Na Pho and Chiang Kham camps. Excluding the Cambodians at the Thai-Cambodian border, who are regarded as displaced persons rather than refugees and are not eligible for resettlement, Laotians represent more than 70 percent of the Southeast Asians in Thai camps, according to March 31 State Department statistics.

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Ethnic Lao Represent a Growing Portion of Laotian Admissions Among the refugees from Laos, a variety of ethnic groups are represented. These ethnic groups reflect, in part, the three regions of the country--lowlands, midlands, and highlands.

In July 1985, Thai authorities began a screening program to decide which Laotian nationals arriving in Thailand would be granted "first asylum." In the first six months of FY 86, 1,006 lowlanders were granted first asylum by the Thais, as opposed to 201 highlanders, mostly Hmong and Mien. Some sources suggest that the highlanders are being "pushed back" to Laos by local Thai authorities before even gaining access to the screening program.

There were 28,748 people in Na Pho, the Thai refugee camp for lowland Lao, at the end of March. U.S. refugee officials estimated that 7,000 to 8,000 would be potentially eligible for U.S. admission, according to a source.

State Department statistics suggest that the number of lowland Lao arriving in the United States has begun an upward trend. In the first six months of FY 86--October 1985 through March 1986--1,223 ethnic Lao and 1,123 highlanders arrived. In April, 1,213 ethnic Lao and 485 highlanders arrived.

Ethnic Lao a Little Known Refugee Group Despite the projected increase in their admissions to the United States, the ethnic Lao remain less well known to the U.S. public than other Southeast Asian refugee ethnic groups.

Vikhom Somphene, a Lao caseworker for Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC/MRS) in the Arlington, Virginia diocese, said, "We [ethnic Lao] are very calm. We don't want to put out news." She added, "We want to avoid problems. We don't know the language. Besides, nobody is interested."

Others suggest that the lowland Lao are less well known than other Southeast Asian refugees because of their less direct connection to the U.S. war effort. "Perhaps their stories are less dramatic than Cambodians under Pol Pot, Vietnamese boat escapes, and Hmong CIA activities," said Ann M. Rynearson, a language specialist at the International Institute of St. Louis and an anthropologist who focuses on the Lao. "But even if less dramatic, the Lao story is equally serious."

Lowland Lao Participated in War Effort, Suffered Consequences Roger Rumpf, of the Asia Resource Center and former American Friends Service Committee representative in Laos, said that the lowland Lao involvement in the war effort was indeed more subtle than that of other Southeast Asian groups, but that large numbers of ethnic Lao were involved in the military, including bombing missions in Laos, and in U.S. aid programs.

For example, Khamsing Rajamountry was an ethnic Lao monk who worked with International Voluntary Services, a private voluntary agency working with U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) funds. He had worked with internally displaced people in the Lao lowlands prior to 1975. He was arrested and accused of being a CIA agent. "I was almost killed in that time," he recalled. He escaped across the Mekong River in 1978. Today, he is a caseworker for USCC/MRS in Columbus, Ohio.

Vongnarat Sonephat, a major in the Lao air force prior to 1975, spent the next six years engaged in hard labor in "seminar," the commonly understood term for Lao "re-education." He told Refugee Reports of years spent in hunger and fear, cutting bamboo under the watchful eyes of his guards.

In 1981, he escaped by swimming across the Mekong River. But his ordeal did not end there. "When the Thai guards caught us, they separated the people and sent some back." He said that the border guards had to be bribed not to return people to Laos.

Rumpf said, "Most of the Lao sent to seminar were lowlanders. And those still there are mostly lowland Lao."

Because their involvement with Americans during the war era was less direct than that of other Southeast Asian ethnic groups, ethnic Lao have faced greater culture shock, according to Joan Hill of Lutheran Social Services in Minneapolis. "Laos is very underdeveloped," she said, "and the complexities of America can be frightening to them." Despite the obstacles, Hill has found the Lao to be "a delightful people who are remarkably motivated."

Lao Refugees Strive for Early Employment In his 1984 study, Labor Force Participation and Employment of Southeast Asian Refugees

Lowland Lao refugees in the United States seek early employment. This Lao woman works at a clothing factory in New York.

Herve Gloaguen/VIVA

in the United States, Robert L. Bach found Lao to have the highest labor force participation rate of any of five Southeast Asian ethnic groups. After controlling for education, time of arrival, age, sex, and pre-arrival English language proficiency, Bach found the Lao to be employed or seeking employment at a rate more than 10 percentage points higher than any of the other groups, and fully 24 percentage points higher than the Vietnamese, commonly considered the most successfully integrated of the Southeast Asian ethnic groups.

John Van Esterick, one of the few researchers to have published studies on the ethnic Lao, wrote in 1985, "This impressive level of employment is dampened by two other survey results. One is that Lao mean weekly wages are among the lowest of any other Southeast Asian refugee group, except the Khmer. The other is that Lao do not have as high a participation in language or other training as do the other groups."

Van Esterick concluded that Lao prefer to find work immediately, even low-paying, entry-level jobs. He also found that the Lao have the lowest use of cash assistance of the Southeast Asian refugee groups.

Local refugee service providers make similar observations. "Over the past several years, the employable Lao have gotten into the job market quickly," said Bob Montgomery, assistant director of the San Diego office of the International Rescue Committee.

In Vurnsville, Minnesota, Rev. Berend Vander Woode, pastor of the Lao Community Reformed Church, which has sponsored or co-sponsored about 50 ethnic Lao families, said, "I think they do quite well with jobs." Vander Woode estimated that about 75 to 80 percent have become self-supporting. "The majority have a good work ethic, are determined, and succeed in moving ahead, even into management positions."

Prof. Kendall Blanchard, chairman of the department of anthropology and sociology at Middle Tennessee State University, suggested

that "Lao refugees might have a lot to teach us--to demonstrate how minorities don't have to be a perpetual underclass." He said that by any measure, ethnic Lao are "better employees" than non-Laotians.

Blanchard asked, "What can we do to take advantage of this new influx of hard-working, motivated, honest people?"

Education Remains Major Hurdle A major obstacle to adaptation, however, is low English proficiency, due, in part, to the relatively low level of contact with Americans in Laos. The Lao, in many cases, have lacked formal education in their homeland, a factor increasingly considered important to successful adaptation and integration. (See article on Refugee Policy Group study, Refugee Reports, Vol. VII, No. 3.)

"We see a tendency in American schools to lump all Southeast Asians together in one classroom and to see all the refugee students as high-performance Vietnamese," said Amy Zaharlick, assistant professor of anthropology at Ohio State University, who has conducted research on ethnic Lao adjustment to the American school system.

Zaharlick found a lack of interest in education among Lao adults. "The majority of people are from rural backgrounds with minimal education. Their primary focus is getting a job, and they see school as too expensive and as something out of their reach."

The lack of emphasis on education, Rynearson added, "will be a big problem for the Lao community." She told Refugee Reports of parents exerting pressure on their children to drop out of school to contribute to the family economically.

Lao refugees interviewed for this story, however, consistently said that education for their children was highly valued. "Our culture stresses education," said Xa Somphat, a mental health counselor in Seattle. "We urge our children to go to college, and very few drop out."

Vilay Chaleunrath, executive director of the Indochina Community Center in Washington, D.C., suggested that the interest in education diminishes somewhat after graduation from high school. "The Lao do not appreciate enough the importance of investing in education. The younger Lao generation wants to enjoy life now, and get jobs to compete for new cars and videos."

Generational Conflict Manageable American refugee service providers are generally impressed with the flexibility and adaptability of the ethnic Lao. Montgomery observed, "The Lao Americanize as quickly as any group." This is most evident among the younger generation. At recent new year's celebrations, he watched a veritable parade of punk and new wave styles among the young people. "They are into clothes, cars, and music," he said, "just as materialistic as the American kids."

These changes are a matter of some concern among the older Lao. "Our children go to American schools and become American," said Khamsing Rajamountry. The former monk said, "They don't understand respect. They walk in front of older people. They say 'yes' instead of 'yes, sir.' And the big, big problem here is Lao boys dating American girls."

Others suggest, however, that Lao young people still highly value close family ties and that they will remain responsible to their parents and the Lao community. "Young teenagers who dress like Prince or Madonna will still go back to Lao traditions for serious dating and will marry within the Lao community," said Father Peter Tran, director of the Lao Mission Team of the Indochinese Catholic Center in Chicago.

Although several observers mentioned social problems such as drinking and gambling, most said that Lao youth do not get involved in serious delinquency.

Factionalism in the Lao Community In places where young men have gotten into trouble, conflict is sometimes traced to factional rivalries within the community. John Litzinger, USCC/MRS director in Columbus, Ohio, told Refugee Reports of gang activity involving drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, and personal threats. He blamed the problem, however, on rivalries among older Lao leaders vying for political power. "Some of the young single men were manipulated by an older leader, who got them to extort money from people," he said.

The Columbus problem emerged out of a cultural context in which rival leaders compete for a loyal following. These relationships, termed "patron-client" by anthropologists and sociologists, are usually a benevolent forging of personal bonds between the leader and individuals whom he

helps.

Van Esterick found Lao to identify with those leaders able to provide them with help, particularly in adjusting to their new life in the United States. Patrons themselves are often employed by social service agencies, which enables them to help find jobs for their clients. Loyalty to a leader is often contingent on services rendered. "Relationships are brittle," Van Esterick wrote, "and clients can always seek new patrons who have more to offer."

The patron-client relationship is generally seen in a positive light by the Lao community, where the phrase, "Lao help each other," is almost a refrain.

Leaders Compete for Followers Problems arise not in the relationships between the patrons and their clients, but between rival patrons.

In Columbus, for example, there are five Lao associations for 500 families. "The people are not as concerned as the leaders," said Rajamountry, "but, realistically, some leaders are jealous and try to destroy the other groups."

Rajamountry said that there is a strong carryover in social organization from Laos. People from similar backgrounds and occupations, in general, try to stick together, so that former police, farmers, soldiers, or pilots will each form their own association.

Loyalty in the United States, however, increasingly goes to those who can be the most helpful, according to Rajamountry. "People follow the leader who provides better services, not on an ideological basis," he said.

Superimposed on social class and political differences are regional and ethnic divisions. In Seattle, for example, Dr. Marjorie Muecke, associate professor at the University of Washington School of Nursing, said that the ethnic Lao look upon the Lao Theung of the midlands region as social inferiors. "Because they don't speak the same language as the lowland Lao, the Lao Theung are virtually excluded from social services with Lao interpreters only."

Although these and other factors contribute towards factionalism in the Lao community, there are also important features that unite it. The wat, or Buddhist temple, plays a central role in the life of the Lao community. Montgomery calls the temple "a steadying factor" for the San Diego Lao community. Similar views were expressed by Laotians and non-Laotians about the role of Buddhist temples in other parts of the country.

Another important factor that maintains community cohesion is the role of women in the Lao community. Zaharlick observed, "The women are immune to factionalism. The wives of rival faction leaders remain friends. While the men divide the community, the women unite it."

Patron-Client Relations Transferred to American Sponsors American sponsors provide many of the same services as Lao patrons. When Lao clients assume that sponsors will act in expected ways, it can result in cultural misunderstandings.

"The Lao will tend to treat the American patron as he treats a patron of his own nationality, applying similar expectations and using similar techniques to make the best possible situation for his family," reported Van Esterick.

Van Esterick observed that Lao tend to judge American and Lao sponsors by the same standards. Lao relate to individuals, not to the organizations with which they are affiliated, according to Van Esterick. Credit or blame goes to the individual patron. This causes particular problems, said Van Esterick, when individual case workers within a church or agency change responsibilities.

While often relating to Americans as patrons, Blanchard said that few genuine friendships grow between the Lao and their American sponsors. He conducted a social census of 289 Lao adults in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and found that less than five percent of them had ever been in an American home.

Cristina Blanc-Szanton, a research associate with the Southeast Asian Institute at Columbia University, who studied the Lao community in northern New Jersey, said that the Lao women there really wanted social contact with their American sponsors, but that the "well-meaning middle class women wanted them to clean their kitchens."

Vander Woode summed up the importance of sponsors approaching the Lao as friends. "If you have a church sponsoring a refugee," he said, "every Laotian family ought to have

one American counterpart just to be their friend--to eat with them, socialize and visit."

Update

° The government of Thailand is expected to announce that all Cambodians at Khao I Dang who have not been approved for resettlement in a third country by September 30 will be returned to the Thai-Cambodian border. In the meantime, it is anticipated that the Thai government will allow resettlement processing of all Cambodians at Khao I Dang, including the "family card holders" and the "ration card holders." The 4,300 family card holders are within the camp, but have so far been ineligible for processing because they arrived after a cutoff date; the 7,000 ration card holders have been moved to Site 7, just outside the camp, and are also ineligible for processing because they entered Khao I Dang without permission after a later cutoff date.

The United States may process as many as 1,000 of the family card holders, those in processing priorities P1 through P4 only, according to sources. However, the United States is not expected to process any of the ration card holders; U.S. policy does not consider them to be distinct from the 245,000 Cambodians in camps along the border, who are not eligible for refugee resettlement processing. Also, the U.S. government has made it clear that the processing and review of the other 15,000 Cambodians within Khao I Dang has been completed. They have already been denied resettlement, and selected cases will be reviewed only on a case-by-case basis.

° Thailand has denied allegations by Amnesty International that three Cambodian refugees were tortured by Task Force 80 personnel at Khao I Dang on March 21 (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VII, No. 5). On May 30, a member of Thailand's National Security Council (NSC) said that the Amnesty report had "incorrect information" and that the organization "may intend to undermine Thailand's reputation." The official said the NSC had investigated the incident and found "the measures taken by Thai officials should be considered correct. There was no torture. At the moment, the three persons are in good health."

Task Force 80 Commander Colonel Phao Pharsan, in a statement issued May 23, said, "The allegations of mistreatment of these criminal detainees by Task Force 80 are categorically denied." He said that "Kampuchean refugees fall under the classification of 'illegal immigrants,' who, under Thai immigration laws, would normally be expelled." However, the three arrested Cambodians had been "mercifully detained" instead, his statement said.

The Thai government maintains the three Cambodians were involved in smuggling bandits into Khao I Dang on March 5 and March 18. On March 18, the three were arrested after allegedly killing a Thai soldier and a refugee the same day, according to the Thais. "They are now awaiting the court's decision," the NSC official said.

Amnesty International's "Urgent Action" memo of May 6 called for the Thai government to establish an independent body to investigate the incident. It also urged the government to try those guilty of torture and to bring the three accused Cambodians to fair trial.

° President Reagan has nominated Jonathan Moore to be the new U.S. coordinator for refugee affairs. Moore's nomination has been submitted to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; it is not clear whether the committee will consider the nomination before the July 4 congressional recess. He must be confirmed by the Senate before taking office. The position has been vacant since H. Eugene Douglas resigned at the end of October 1985.

Moore is the director of the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. He recently served on the independent panel appointed by Secretary of State George P. Shultz to study the Southeast Asian refugee situation. The panel, headed by Robert Ray, former Iowa governor, made its recommendations April 18. Moore has held important posts in Democratic and Republican administrations. He was deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs in the Nixon administration.

° Rep. Pat Swindall (R-Ga.) responded to an account of an interview he gave with the

Atlanta Journal and Constitution, in which he was reported to have said that Mariel Cubans remaining in custody should be set adrift in lifeboats in the Caribbean (see Refugee Reports Vol. VII, No. 5).

Swindall said that his quote was taken out of context. In his May 4 letter to the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, Swindall called for improvements in conditions at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, if the Cuban detainees are to continue to be confined there. However, he questioned keeping these detainees in "judicial limbo." He said that "to continue to imprison the Cubans indefinitely would be infinitely more inhumane than returning them to Cuba."

In advocating the return of the 2,000 Mariel detainees to Cuba, Swindall said he was by no means suggesting that we do so "with reckless indifference to the safety of the detainees." He suggested, however, that if diplomatic efforts should continue to be fruitless, "we should explore the possibility of returning the prisoners in precisely the same fashion as they came." He said that the possibility of their drowning was "virtually impossible," since he was suggesting that "they be transported to the edge of international waters, which is only three miles from the Cuban coastline, where they would obviously reach Cuba in a relatively short period of time."

° Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) introduced a bill that would temporarily stay the detention and deportation of Nicaraguans currently in the United States, pending a General Accounting Office study of displaced Nicaraguans. The bill, H.R. 4893, contains the identical provisions for Nicaraguans as the Moakley-DeConcini bill contains for Salvadorans in the United States. The bill, when introduced, was cosponsored by Rep. Joe Moakley (D-Mass.), Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.), and George W. Crockett, Jr. (D-Mich.) and has been referred to the Committees on Foreign Affairs, the Judiciary, and Rules.

° Romania informed the United States on June 2 that it would allow 1,000 people to emigrate in the near future. On June 3, President Reagan approved another annual extension of most-favored-nation trading status, which lowers import tariffs to Romania. The Jackson-Vanick Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act prohibits the United States from granting most-favored-nation status to any communist country that restricts emigration, unless the president determines that the country is relaxing its emigration policies (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VII, No. 1).

° Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union was reached on June 2 to allow more than 200 Soviet citizens exit visas to reunite 72 cases of divided Soviet-American families.

° At its annual convention marking Amnesty International's twenty-fifth anniversary, Amnesty International USA passed a resolution asserting that governments should provide equal consideration of applications for asylum regardless of the asylum seeker's country of origin. It also urged countries to grant temporary safe haven in an even-handed way to groups who could become subject to civil strife and violence in their home countries.

Recent Developments

THAILAND'S SITE 8 SHELLED--12 KILLED, SCORES INJURED

At least 9, and perhaps as many as 12, Cambodians, including two children, were killed in a morning shelling of Site 8 camp in Thailand on May 29. Between 30 and 50 were injured, most of them children. According to the State Department, the most critically wounded were evacuated to the hospital at Khao I Dang.

Site 8, a Khmer Rouge camp holding 30,000 Cambodians, is located four kilometers from the Cambodian border. Although casualty reports varied, both the United Nations Border Relief Operation and CARE, which has a mission at the camp, reported 12 dead.

Reports on the origin of the shelling also varied. According to Thai officials, the shells were fired by Vietnamese from positions in Cambodia eight to twelve kilometers from the camp. However, a source at the State Department said some reports they received indicated the shelling may have resulted from factional fighting within the

camp itself. "This doesn't fit Vietnam's typical pattern," the State Department source said. A spokesman for the Vietnamese mission to the United Nations had no comment on the incident.

According to the Thai embassy, Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge forces were fighting nearby when the attack occurred. The shelling, though brief, forced most of the Cambodians at Site 8 to flee to nearby fields. On May 30, the Bangkok World reported that 2,000 refugees refused to return to the camp. On June 4, an official for CARE said the camp had not been evacuated. "We anticipate a return to normal soon," the official said.

SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE TO HOLD MID-YEAR REFUGEE CONSULTATION

The Senate's immigration and refugee subcommittee chaired by Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) has scheduled a mid-year refugee consultation with the administration for June 19.

Testimony has been invited from the State Department, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. According to Richard Day, majority counsel to the subcommittee, ORR has been asked to address the effects of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget deficit reduction law on the refugee program; the State Department has been asked to discuss how refugee admissions are going in FY 86 and what is expected for FY 87; and INS has been asked to address the situation in Southeast Asia, particularly the future of the Cambodians who remain at Khao I Dang and the completed review of those cases at Khao I Dang denied U.S. resettlement.

Sen. Simpson is concerned about the lack of progress on recommendations he made after returning from Southeast Asia last year, Day said. At that time, Simpson suggested that family reunification be achieved through regular immigration processing. Day said that Simpson would like to know why very few Southeast Asians have come to the United States through immigration channels so far, and why little has been done to provide education for Cambodians at the border, a recommendation he and others have made for some time.

REFUGEE PROGRAMS FACE BUDGET HURDLES

The U.S. government's major refugee program priority is for "life preservation needs," according to James N. Purcell, Jr., director of the Bureau for Refugee Programs (BRP), in April 18 testimony before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

Purcell said that BRP would soon propose a change in programming away from refugee resettlement.

Purcell made his comments during the State Department request for $347.5 million for FY 87 in migration and refugee assistance. This includes funds for assistance to refugees overseas and for admission of refugees to the United States. The subcommittee is due to mark-up (consider amendments and vote on whether to send the bill to full committee) the foreign operations appropriation bill in the third week of June.

Purcell noted that the ceiling requested for FY 87 refugee admissions to the United States is 63,000, a reduction from the FY 86 request for 67,000, which itself was reduced to about 64,000 by Gramm/Rudman/Hollings deficit reduction cuts.

The refugee admissions budget request represents a reduction of $5.5 million from the FY 86 funding level as reduced by Gramm/Rudman/Hollings budget cuts.

Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.), chairman of the subcommittee, told Purcell, "Your program is obviously a very high priority for this subcommittee." He added, however, that the administration was not providing enough money to support this and other programs. Obey said that any reductions in the appropriation would not be made on the basis of substantive objections to the refugee program, but rather as a reflection of the larger budget picture.

Refugee Program Budget Cuts Anticipated as Part of Deficit Reduction Efforts Both the House and Senate passed budget resolutions cutting the administration's foreign aid request for FY 87. The Senate budget would cut foreign aid by $700 million; the House version cuts the budget to an even deeper $1 billion from current levels.

Washington representatives of voluntary

agencies are worried that the cuts in the State Department's migration and refugee assistance account could be much larger since the administration wants to maintain existing levels of support for Israel and Egypt and because other security-related accounts would be immune from across-the-board Gramm/Rudman/Hollings cuts.

"The fear," said Michael Myers, Washington representative of Church World Service, "is that not all accounts will be given their fair share of cuts."

Zdenka Seiner, assistant director of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, noted, "The refugee account tends to fall between the cracks of the overall foreign assistance debate between those with concern for development programs versus those with security interests."

In testimony before Obey's subcommittee on April 10, Nancy Iris, policy and information coordinator of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, said, "Refugees are neither buildings, nor roads, nor missiles. They are people--people who need care and protection. Hunger and pain can't wait until the end of the fiscal year for the reprogramming of accounts or the passage of supplemental bills."

In written testimony submitted to the subcommittee on April 25, Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, executive director of Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Catholic Conference, voiced particular concern about the proposed 6 percent reduction in refugee admissions for FY 87.

He said, "Experience has shown that when the U.S. restricts refugee admissions, other Western resettlement countries follow suit, thus resulting in even fewer resettlement opportunities..." DiMarzio added, "Experience has also shown that restrictive U.S. refugee policy causes first-asylum countries to deal with the refugee crisis through forced repatriation, a solution that has meant loss of lives."

EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO TRACK ASIAN SUDDEN DEATHS

Typically, he is a young, healthy male Laotian refugee who has been in the United States about nine months. After a normal dinner, perhaps a beer or two in the evening, he goes to bed at about midnight. Then, in his sleep about three hours later he begins to groan. He never regains consciousness.

The autopsy shows nothing that explains the underlying cause of death.

This describes sudden unexplained death syndrome (SUDS), a mysterious form of death that causes fear in the Southeast Asian refugee community and bafflement among health researchers.

The sudden, mysterious death rate among Laotian refugees, particularly the Hmong, is unusually high. "The SUNDS death rate (87/100,000) among Laotian men age 25-44 is comparable to the sum of the rates of the four leading causes of death in all U.S. males of that age group," according to the Final Report of the SUNDS Planning Project, published in 1984 under the direction of Dr. Neal Holtan. [Since not all deaths have occurred at night, the word "nocturnal" has been dropped from SUNDS, the term that earlier described the syndrome.]

Ninety-six SUDS cases have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) since 1977. In addition to the 97 known deaths, an additional 26 reported cases came to light after the Public Health Foundation sent a notice in February to more than 4,000 medical examiners and coroners defining the syndrome and asking them to report possible cases. A CDC pathologist is currently reviewing the latest reported cases to see if they fit the definition. Of the 26 reports, 6 have been confirmed as SUDS cases--the remainder are awaiting additional corroborating details.

Speculation on Causes of Sudden Death

Various hypotheses for the deaths have been raised, but none has been adequately explored. Some in the refugee community itself attribute the deaths to evil spirits or to the spirits of abandoned ancestors in Laos.

Dr. Marjorie Muecke of the University of Washington School of Nursing has tracked reports of a liver-eating homicidal ghost, the phii kā, who is believed by many in the Laotian community to have been transported from Laos to the United States and then to have traveled across the country leaving death in its wake. She said, "While the spirit is believed to be in town, refugees report sicknesses and stay home from work."

A study by Joseph Jay Tobin and Joan

Friedman in 1983 posited the hypothesis that the deaths were caused by nightmares. Based on a case study of a Hmong refugee who was resuscitated from a near-death episode, the authors suggest that the deaths "may be a form of unconscious suicide mediated by a loss of self respect, a loss of control over one's life, and a loss of will to live in such anxious circumstances." The nightmare of a demon sitting on his chest and preventing him from breathing was the Hmong refugee's explanation of the occurrence.

The authors speculate that the nightmare could be a cause as well as an effect: as one incorporates external stimuli into a dream (such as a phone ring), the shortness of breath the sleeping person experiences could be "his sleeping mind's metaphorical description of his body's physiological condition."

Western Health Researchers Search for Clues Dr. Kathleen Hoerner, a physician responsible for SUDS surveillance at the Public Health Foundation, said, "I find it medically hard to believe that nightmares could cause death without other predisposing factors."

Ron Munger, a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Minneapolis School of Public Health, is looking for just such factors. He is recording electrocardiagrams (ECGs) of newly arrived refugees and has found evidence of heart abnormalities. He doesn't think that he has sufficient data yet to draw any conclusions.

His research took him to Ban Vinai, the Hmong refugee camp in Thailand, for nine months in 1982-83 and again in January 1985. He was able to document the occurrence of SUDS in Thailand (as well as in the Philippines) and to isolate possible aggravating factors. He found evidence of acute emotional distress in some cases and suggested the possibility that such emotions could precipitate irregular heart beats.

In tracing some of the victims' geneologies, Munger was also able to find evidence to suggest a higher occurrence among their family members. In fact, he found the syndrome to be more prevalent among the green than the white Hmong subgroup. Munger cautions that the explanation is not necessarily genetic, as a variety of shared experiences could explain the higher likelihood of the syndrome among relatives.

Dr. Bruce Bliatout, program development specialist for the Multnomah County Health Services Division in Portland, Oregon, and himself a Hmong, conducted similar studies among exile Hmong communities in 1982. Unlike Munger, he found no significant prevalence of SUDS among the green Hmong, but did find higher incidences of the syndrome in certain clans.

Bliatout leans toward a genetic hypothesis, but believes stress is also a factor. He said that this is a new phenomenon for the Hmong, but questioned whether it is a result of the refugee experience. "We have always struggled with our neighbors and have experienced killings, slaughter, and hangings before. But we are unfamiliar with SUDS in our past. We never heard of cases before the mid-1970's."

Holtan said that he did not think stress would be sufficient in itself to cause arrhythmia. He too is looking at other factors, particularly genetic and cardiac. One hypothesis he would like to explore further is the possibility of low potassium as a causal factor, as a result of some combination of stress and diet. In any case, said Holtan, "I suspect it is a combination of factors."

Nampet Panichpant, program coordinator for the International Refugee Health Assistance Program of Orange County California Public Health and Medical Services, said, "I have tried to check everything--rituals, foods. I even checked bottles for brand names to see if I could find a pattern." She said that it is difficult to make much progress because "limited interest has meant no continuous coordination and follow-up."

Information Center Established The Public Health Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control have a new ally in the effort to educate the public about SUDS. The Asian Sudden Death Information Center is acting as a clearinghouse for information on the syndrome..

For the time being, accurate surveillance remains the most important problem. "CDC has an excellent network with the public health sector," said Roberta Aitchison, information coordinator for the center. "We are trying to reach a cross-section of people who might not have direct contact with public health." Such groups, she said, include mutual assistance associations,

voluntary agencies, health care providers, and social service agencies. Aitchison is encouraging refugee service providers and the refugee community to report SUDS cases to the Public Health Foundation, which is coordinating data collection for CDC researchers.

To report incidents or to locate the SUDS coordinators in each state public health department, contact Kathleen Hoerner, M.D., Public Health Foundation, 1220 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 898-5600.

For further information about SUDS, contact Roberta Aitchison, Asian Sudden Death Information Center, 640 Jackson St., St. Paul, MN 55101. (612) 221-3539.

Projects and Programs

PHONE-IN TAPES GIVE HMONG HEALTH ADVICE

Hmong refugees who live in five Wisconsin cities and surrounding communities can receive Hmong-language information about common health problems over the phone, thanks to a new service jointly developed by the state of Wisconsin's Department of Health and Social Services and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

According to Tam C. Phan, director of the Wisconsin Refugee Health Program, and coordinator of the project, the Hmong callers can select from one of eight four-minute taped messages: car safety for your baby; how to use prescription drugs; strep throat; an appointment with your physician; viral hepatitis; the flu; my child has a fever; and lice are not nice.

Phan said these topics were picked by leaders of Wisconsin's Hmong community from a list of 700 titles which comprise the English-language Health-Line system, administered for several years by the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The Hmong project evolved out of the need to provide health education to refugees who are illiterate in their own language, Phan said. He added that, culturally, Hmong tend to be shy about asking personal health questions. The Health-Line was seen as a way to overcome these problems.

"My Child Has a Fever" Most Requested Hmong Message The Hmong Health-Line began December 1, 1985, and serves Madison, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Green Bay, and Sheboygan. Callers from outside those local areas can use a toll-free number. Each toll-free call costs the project seven cents, Phan said.

The English-language Health-Line system has 50 subscribers, mostly hospitals, who purchase cassette copies of the messages. According to Ann Whitaker, coordinator of the system for the university, medical information in each message is developed in conjunction with the university's medical school faculty. Though most of the 700 messages deal strictly with medical concerns, some discuss sexual topics.

Whitaker said that herpies, weight loss, and diet are the most requested subjects in the English system. "My child has a fever," is the most used Hmong tape, according to Phan.

The state of Wisconsin's Division of Health funds the project.

Meetings and Conferences

° A conference titled "Action Strategies to Ensure the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons" will take place June 24-25 at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The conference theme will be the ethical imperative of protecting refugee women, children, and the elderly. Methods of coalition building and advocacy on behalf of refugees will also be discussed. The conference is being sponsored by the National Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Forum. For information, contact Berta Romero or Yasmin Santiago at (202) 544-0004, or write the National Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Forum, 533 8th St., S.E., Washington, DC 20003.

Current Research

REFUGEE USE OF MEDICAL ASSISTANCE LOW

Refugees were found to use fewer Medicaid services at less cost than the general Medicaid population, according to a recent study by SysteMetrics for the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Health Care

Financing Administration.

Based on 1981 data from California, New York, and Tennessee, the report found refugees who qualify for medical benefits through AFDC much less likely to use either walk-in or in-patient hospital care than general AFDC recipients.

Refugees in all three states were also found to cost less to treat on a per capita basis than general AFDC recipients. AFDC refugee adults in Tennessee had annual average Medicaid costs of $532 in 1981, compared to $749 for AFDC adults in Tennessee's general Medicaid population (a difference of 41 percent). California refugees were 22 percent less expensive to treat; New York, 16 percent.

The report, Refugee Medical Assistance Study Final Report, also shows that children in the general AFDC population consistently had greater health-care costs than refugee children. In Tennessee, AFDC children in the general population had Medicaid expenditures 38 percent greater than the amount expended for AFDC refugee children. The largest cost difference for children was in New York, where general AFDC population children incurred costs 52 percent higher than their refugee counterparts. The California children in the general AFDC population cost an average of 17 percent higher than refugee children.

A companion study, Refugee Medical Assistance in California, 1981, gives further details on the California study. Only in California were there sufficient numbers of non-Southeast Asian refugees to make comparisons between Southeast Asian and other refugees. Non-Southeast Asian refugees incurred per capita costs at double the Southeast Asian rate ($1,891 versus $727).

The report noted, however, that the Southeast Asian refugee population was considerably younger than the non-Southeast Asian refugees. Only 1 percent of Southeast Asians were elderly, compared to 25 percent of non-Southeast Asians.

The most common in-patient care for California refugees involved pregnancy and childbirth (27 percent of hospital claims). In New York, on the other hand, refugees were more likely to be admitted for diseases of the circulatory system (22 percent of claims).

The Final Report also points out that about 10 percent of refugees accounted for 63 to 70 percent of all refugee medical assistance costs in 1981. It warns that it is misleading to think in terms of average refugee use of medical assistance since "a small group of refugees was responsible for most of the medical care utilization and costs." In California, for example, per capita costs for these "high cost" refugees were $4,763 in 1981, compared to $832 for the remainder.

To order the reports, contact Ellen McGovern at the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Department of Health and Human Services, 330 C St., SW, Rm. 1229, Washington, DC 20201. (202) 245-0418.

Reader Exchange

° The last issue of Refugee Reports, Vol. VII, No. 5, carried an update which stated that "more than 60 percent of Nicaraguan asylum cases decided by INS district directors in FY 86 have been approved." This reflected the approval rate for the first five months of FY 86, October 1985 through February 1986, for which the approval rate was 61 percent. INS has pointed out that the approval rate for the first six months of FY 86, through March, is 57 percent and has requested that the following explanation of asylum approval rate be published:

> The most recent INS asylum statistics (for the first 6 months of FY 86) do not accurately reflect the reality of asylum decisions for many nationalities. Several INS district offices have been unable to complete denial cases due to a shortage of secretarial personnel. As a result, at least 2,200 denial cases have not been typed and mailed, although draft decisions have been prepared in these cases. This has caused a distortion in the statistics overall and for specific nationalities such as Nicaraguans and Salvadorans.
>
> Approvals are handled by a standard letter in which the name of the applicant and his/her country of origin can be written in by hand and the form letter is then reviewed and signed by the district director. Denial cases are handled with greater attention to detail in the responses. Both a lengthy

notice of intent to deny and a denial letter must be typed, and this is the source of the backlog in completed denials.

A comparison of statistics for FY 85 with the first 6 months of FY 86 shows an overall jump in approval rates as noted below. It is expected that by the end of the fiscal year, the approval rates will be closer to the rates for FY 85.

	FY 85	FY 86
All Nationalities	24%	40%
Nicaragua	9%	57%
El Salvador	3%	8%

- The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) has prepared an information packet for Ugandans who are in the United States under extended voluntary departure (EVD). The packet tells Ugandans what they can expect from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and what they and their families should do if they wish to remain in the United States or return to Uganda. The legal status of these Ugandans may soon change. The State Department has recommended a continuance of EVD until July 31, 1986; however, it is possible that EVD may not be extended much longer than that. USCR has met with State Department and INS officials in an effort to understand the government's developing immigration policy with respect to Ugandans, and to advocate a humane approach to their possible return. To request a packet, call or write USCR, 815 15th St., NW, Suite 610, Washington, D.C. 20005. (202) 667-0782.

Resources

HMONG ADAPTATION EXPLORED

Papers presented at the second Hmong Research Conference in 1983 at the University of Minnesota have been collected in a single volume.

Just published by the Center for Migration Studies and the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project of the University of Minnesota, The Hmong in Transition features analysis of the cultural changes that have occurred in the Hmong refugee community.

Essays by experts from various fields discuss issues of concern for successful resettlement, such as secondary migration, employment and dependency on public assistance, job training for Hmong women, and highlights of the Office of Refugee Resettlement-funded Hmong Resettlement Study.

Other aspects of social adjustment are treated, including two revealing case studies. The first, arising from a sexual assault case, shows discrepancies between the U.S. legal system and traditional Hmong practices for resolving interpersonal conflicts. The second explores the breakdown of a needlework cooperative after the refugee women transferred their traditional understanding of Hmong patron-client relationships to the American women volunteers working with them.

Several essays on linguistics reveal patterns in a grammar quite unlike English. These essays, in addition to providing insights for teachers of English as a second language, contribute toward the preservation and understanding of Hmong culture itself.

Hmong beliefs about health and traditional healing are the subjects of several essays. One outlines guidelines for Western mental health professionals on how and when to use traditional healers. Another describes field work on sudden nocturnal deaths and sleep disorders among Hmong refugees at the Ban Vinai camp in Thailand.

The 464-page volume is available for $12.95 (paper), $17.95 (cloth), plus postage ($3.00 first class; $3.00 libraries; $4.00 international) from the Center for Migration Studies, 209 Flagg Place, Staten Island, NY 10304. (718) 351-8800.

HMONG ORAL TRADITIONS WRITTEN

A bilingual collection of Hmong folktales, proverbs, and poetry, as well as biographies and descriptions of daily life and traditional needlework, are featured in Grandmother's Path, Grandfather's Way.

The book, published by the Zellerbach Family Fund as part of the Hmong Preservation Project, is an attempt by a group of Hmong refugees, led by Lue Vang, to document in written form oral traditions that the

nonliterate Hmong culture has passed from generation to generation.

"I know that if we don't take the time to write down the words of the elders," Lue Vang writes, "when they are gone, we will not know our Hmong life and customs." With the help of Judy Lewis, who contributed to the English translations, the 197-page book becomes valuable not only to the Hmong community, but also to Americans who want a greater appreciation and understanding of Hmong culture.

Grandmother's Path, Grandfather's Way can be ordered for $14.98 from Lue Vang or Judy Lewis at 2202 River Trails Circle, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670. (916) 635-6815.

HIGHLAND LAO INITIATIVE EVALUATED

A $3 million emergency initiative started in 1983 to bolster stability among highland Lao--predominantly Hmong-- communities outside California has been evaluated in a November 1985 report released by the Office of Refugee Resettlement in March 1986.

The report, prepared by Coffey, Zimmerman and Associates, was intended to evaluate whether the goals of the Highland Lao Initiative (HLI) were met. The initiative was intended to stabilize highland Lao communities by, in part, increasing employment, decreasing welfare dependency, and stemming secondary migration, particularly to the Central Valley of California.

Overall, the study found, welfare utilization in HLI program areas fell by about one quarter. Public assistance was most notably reduced in sites with successful job placements. Wisconsin was an exception to the downward trend in welfare utilization.

Though the authors cautioned that data was limited, they found evidence to suggest that the initiative slowed secondary migration.

The report noted, "These refugees will continue to require the attention and assistance of ORR for some years to come. However, there is no need to provide continued special funding to every highland Lao community originally served by the HLI."

The report can be ordered from Allen Call, Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1229 Switzer Building, 330 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20201.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON LAOS AVAILABLE

A new bibliography on Laos has been compiled by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore.

Laos: A Bibliography is a particularly valuable source on English-language resources for the period 1975-1984. The 253-page volume provides information on materials relating to Laotian history, politics, culture, and ethnography.

Although a section is devoted to refugees and displaced persons, the bibliography does not cover many of the materials relating to refugee resettlement and adjustment in the United States.

The bibliography is available from the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Pasir Panjang, Singapore 0511, Republic of Singapore.

VIDEO SHOWS LAO BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

The first consecration of a Lao Buddhist temple in the Midwest is documented on a videotape produced by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. "Rebirth of a Culture: A Lao Temple in the Midwest" also shows the ordination of monks and indicates both continuity and change in the Lao religious adaptation to the American environment.

The 28-minute, color videotape is available in VHS. To order, send $20, prepaid, to the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115-2854. (815) 753-1771.

BOOKS PROVIDE HEALTH CARE INFORMATION AND ORIENTATION FOR SOUTHEAST ASIANS

A bilingual medical guide and accompanying medical glossary provide an important health resource for the Southeast Asian community in the United States. The guides and glossaries, published by the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center of Portland, Oregon, are available in Cambodian/English, Lao/English, or Vietnamese/English.

The Medical Guide: An Introduction to Medical Service in North America serves as a counterpart to Southeast Asian Health Care: A Cultural Guide, also produced by

the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center. The Cultural Guide helped to orient U.S. health care professionals about traditional Southeast Asian approaches to health care. Now, the Medical Guide provides similar orientation for Southeast Asians about the U.S. health care system and practices.

The Medical Guide orients its readers to such subjects as visits to the doctor, and explains medical practices such as taking blood samples, medical histories, and physical examinations. The guide emphasizes preventive health measures such as personal hygiene, nutrition, home safety, and first aid. It also devotes attention to reproductive concerns.

The Medical Glossary: A Phrasebook for Bilingual Health Care lets patients know the questions they are likely to be asked in U.S. health clinics and hospitals. It includes anatomical diagrams labeled in English and the native language and alphabetical listings in both languages of key health-related words and phrases.

The Medical Guide is available for $7.50 and the Medical Glossary for $5.50 from the Indochinese Cultural and Service Center, 3030 S.W. Second Ave., Portland, OR 97201.

SCREENING TOOL MEASURES SOUTHEAST ASIAN MENTAL HEALTH

A bilingual screening questionnaire in Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese enables health and mental health providers to detect anxiety and depression levels among Southeast Asian refugees.

Adapted from the well known and widely used Hopkins Symptom Checklist, the version developed specifically for Southeast Asians allows them to identify feelings that they otherwise might not be able to express.

The Hopkins Symptom Checklist 25 Manual: Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Versions is available for $50 from the Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic, Brighton Marine Public Health Center, 77 Warren St., Brighton, MA 02135. (617) 782-3400.

USCR ISSUE BRIEFS AVAILABLE

Three new issue briefs are available free-of-charge from the U.S. Committee for Refugees: "Looking for Phantoms: Flaws in the Khmer Rouge Screening Process," by Stephen Golub, examines the shortcomings of a U.S. review process which sometimes fails to distinguish between members of the Khmer Rouge and those who were its unwilling victims. "Human Rights in Uganda: A Season of Hope for its Refugees and Displaced Persons," by Roger Winter, USCR director, based on his recent trip to Uganda, discusses the improved human rights conditions under Uganda's new leadership. "Living in Limbo: The Boat Refugees of Hong Kong and Macao," by Allen K. Jones, looks at the plight of 9,000 Vietnamese boat refugees, many of whom have been forced to live in closed camps for years, and whose prospects of resettlement elsewhere grow increasingly dim.

Refugee Reports subscribers automatically receive USCR's World Refugee Survey and issue papers, but not these and other issue briefs. To order, write to USCR, 815 15th St., NW, Suite 610, Washington, D.C. 20005.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT EXPLORED

A collection of essays on refugee resettlement has been published by the Center for Migration Studies in Working with Refugees.

Edited by Peter I. Rose, the 110-page volume includes essays by a variety of people in the refugee field. They examine questions of protection, adaptation, and services for refugees, and discuss the rules governing the selection for relocation in "third countries" such as the United States.

Working with Refugees is available from the Center for Migration Studies, 209 Flagg Place, Staten Island, NY 10304. (718) 351-8800. The cost is $17.50 (cloth), $12.95 (paper).

BILINGUAL/ESL CATALOGUE AVAILABLE

A catalogue of bilingual and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) materials, featuring special items for refugee students, is now available.

Noteworthy materials include "Tales of Marvel and Wonder," a collection of 23 Southeast Asian fables, "Legends from Vietnam," and "Festivals from Far Away."

To order, contact the University of Iowa, CEEDE, N345 Oakdale Hall, Oakdale, IA 52319.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES: ESTIMATED CUMULATIVE STATE POPULATIONS a/
INCLUDING ENTRIES FROM 1975 THROUGH MARCH 31, 1986

STATE OF RESIDENCE	ESTIMATED TOTAL	STATE OF RESIDENCE	ESTIMATED TOTAL
ALABAMA	3,100	NEVADA	2,100
ALASKA	200	NEW HAMPSHIRE	800
ARIZONA	5,400	NEW JERSEY	7,000
ARKANSAS	2,600	NEW MEXICO	2,000
CALIFORNIA	310,000	NEW YORK	29,600
COLORADO	10,700	NORTH CAROLINA	5,400
CONNECTICUT	7,200	NORTH DAKOTA	900
DELAWARE	300	OHIO	10,600
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	1,700 b/	OKLAHOMA	8,800
FLORIDA	13,100	OREGON	17,800
GEORGIA	10,100	PENNSYLVANIA	26,200
HAWAII	6,700	RHODE ISLAND	6,000
IDAHO	1,700	SOUTH CAROLINA	2,100
ILLINOIS	26,000	SOUTH DAKOTA	1,000
INDIANA	4,000	TENNESSEE	5,[illegible]
IOWA	9,000	TEXAS	58,[illegible]
KANSAS	10,200	UTAH	8,300
KENTUCKY	2,400	VERMONT	600
LOUISIANA	14,300	VIRGINIA	21,400
MAINE	1,800	WASHINGTON	35,500
MARYLAND	9,500	WEST VIRGINIA	400
MASSACHUSETTS	23,700	WISCONSIN	10,300
MICHIGAN	10,600	WYOMING	200
MINNESOTA	24,900	GUAM	300
MISSISSIPPI	1,900		
MISSOURI	7,200	OTHER TERRITORIES	c/
MONTANA	800		
NEBRASKA	2,100	TOTAL	782,700

a/ Adjustments for secondary migration were last incorporated into these estimates as of September 30, 1985. All totals rounded to the nearest hundred.
b/ Annual figures for the District of Columbia are overstated because they are based on the address of the sponsoring organization. Most of those persons are thought to settle directly in nearby Maryland or Virginia.
c/ Fewer than 100.

Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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